

Ankle Arthritis

We're going to take a look at ankle arthritis. Arthritis in the ankle is often categorized as an "overuse" condition of the ankle, which I'll explain in more detail later on.

Ankle Arthritis: A Common Overuse Condition of the Ankle

We've all heard of arthritis, an extremely common condition that many of us have in various joints of the body, from our hands to our hips to our knees, spine, and feet. But not many people know that arthritis is a *general* term that includes a group of more than 100 diseases. The most common form of arthritis that occurs in the ankle is osteoarthritis, which many people refer to simply as arthritis.

Arthritis

- Arthritis—a general term for a group of more than 100 diseases
 - Osteoarthritis—the most common form of arthritis in the ankle

"Arthritis" means "joint inflammation." Arthritis in the ankle joint can produce swelling and pain. Over time, ankle arthritis can eventually lead to deformity of the joint, loss of joint function, and decreased ability to walk.

Arthritis Is Joint Inflammation

Arthritis in the ankle joint:

- Can produce swelling and pain
- Can lead to
 - Deformity
 - Loss of joint function
 - Decreased ability to walk

What exactly is osteoarthritis? Osteoarthritis is a condition that affects the cartilage in the joint. Cartilage is normally a smooth connective tissue found at the end of bones that enables smooth movement between the ends of the two bones that make up a joint. The smooth surface allows for movement with minimal friction. But when the cartilage is damaged, the rough surface causes friction between the two ends of the bone, leading to inflammation and subsequent pain.

What Is Osteoarthritis?

- Affects the cartilage in the joint
 - Cartilage: connective tissue between two bones
 - Cartilage enables smooth movement between the ends of two bones

- Damaged cartilage (in osteoarthritis)
 - Friction between the ends of two bones
 - Leads to inflammation and pain

Other terms are also used to describe osteoarthritis. Osteoarthritis is also known as “degenerative arthritis” or a “wear and tear” disease. Both terms reflect the nature of this condition to develop as part of the aging process due to all the use the joint undergoes over time.

Other Terms for Osteoarthritis

- Also called “degenerative arthritis” or a “wear and tear” disease
- Part of the aging process and use

That leads us to the most common cause of osteoarthritis, which is repeated use over time. Repeated stress and use year after year causes the cartilage in the joint to wear down. As the cartilage deteriorates and gets thinner, the bones lose their protective covering and may rub together. For some people whose osteoarthritis is severe, the doctor might say that the cartilage has completely worn away and the patient’s case is “bone on bone.”

A second possible cause of ankle arthritis is a past injury, such as a broken bone or a severe sprain. It may take months or years after the injury for arthritis to develop.

In other people, osteoarthritis can develop as a result of a faulty foot structure, such as flat feet or high arches.

Causes of Ankle Arthritis

- Use over time
- Past injury
- Faulty foot structure

People with ankle arthritis will experience one or more symptoms, in varying degrees. These symptoms include pain and stiffness in the ankle joint, swelling in or near the joint, and difficulty walking or bending the joint.

Symptoms of Arthritis in the Ankle

- Pain and stiffness in the ankle joint
- Swelling in or near the ankle joint
- Difficulty walking or bending the ankle

Many people need relief for these troubling symptoms and seek the care of a foot and ankle surgeon, a specialist who is trained to treat a wide variety of foot and ankle conditions, including ankle arthritis. Once this specialist thoroughly evaluates your condition, a treatment plan targeted to your specific needs can begin. Treatment can involve either non-surgical options or surgery.

A Treatment Plan for Your Needs

The foot and ankle surgeon will:

- Evaluate your condition
- Develop a targeted treatment
 - Non-surgical treatment options
 - Surgery

Non-surgical—or conservative—treatment options may include taking oral medications, such as ibuprofen, to reduce the pain and swelling. Bracing may also be prescribed. Bracing serves the purpose of restricting motion and supporting the ankle joint. This can reduce the pain experienced when walking and can help prevent further deterioration. Another non-surgical option consists of steroid injections in the joint. These injections deliver anti-inflammatory medication directly to the affected area to reduce pain and inflammation.

Non-Surgical (Conservative) Treatment of Ankle Arthritis

- Oral anti-inflammatory medications
- Bracing
- Injections

If a patient's osteoarthritis has progressed substantially or had failed to improve with conservative treatment, surgery may be recommended. In fact, in advanced cases, surgery may be the only option available to decrease pain and improve function. Depending on the patient's medical condition, age, and other considerations, the surgeon will recommend one of two surgical options: either fusion (also called arthrodesis) or total ankle replacement surgery (also called ankle arthroplasty), which is fast becoming the procedure of choice for many people.

Surgical Options for Ankle Arthritis

- Fusion (arthrodesis)
- Total ankle replacement (arthroplasty)

Fusion, or arthrodesis, is a procedure that has been used with success for many years to treat problematic cases of ankle arthritis. In this procedure, the joint is removed and the bones of the joint are fused together. This takes away the pain. However, it also makes the joint immobile. So there are benefits and drawbacks to this procedure.

Fusion (Arthrodesis) of the Ankle

- Performed for decades
- Joint is removed and bones are fused
- Takes away the pain
- Makes the joint immobile

Total ankle replacement is becoming increasingly popular due to breakthroughs in technology. Similar to knee and hip replacement surgery, ankle replacement surgery involves replacing the damaged joint with an artificial joint, or implant. Although total ankle replacement has been around for more than 30 years, recent advances have led to the availability of expanded choices of effective implants. Ankle replacement eliminates the pain of arthritis and also enables full movement of the joint. However, not everyone is a candidate for this procedure. Your foot and ankle surgeon will determine whether this procedure is right for you.

Ankle Replacement (Arthroplasty)

- Replaces the damaged joint with an implant
- Takes away the pain
- Restores full movement of the joint
- Your surgeon will determine whether this procedure is right for you

If you're experiencing bothersome pain due to ankle arthritis, don't despair. There are effective treatment options available to relieve your pain and help you function normally again.

Effective Relief Is Available for Ankle Arthritis